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Mr. Gentry

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November 8, 1962

TO: EUR - Mr. William Tyler
ARA - Mr. Edwin Martin
INR - Mr. Roger Hilman
G/PM - Mr. Jeffrey Kitchen

FROM: S/P - W. W. Easton

SUBJECT: Possible Effects of Cuban Crisis on Future Soviet Military Posture & Policy Implications for the US.

I commend to you the attached paper, "Possible Effects of Cuban Crisis on Future Soviet Military Posture and Policy Implications for the US," prepared by Tom Wolfe and Andy Marshall, ISA/DOD.

Attachment:
As stated above.

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DEPT. OF STATE
POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF CUBAN CRISIS ON FUTURE
SOVIET MILITARY POSTURE & POLICY
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US

OFFICE OF DIRECTOR
S/P

I. Introduction

The Cuban crisis undoubtedly has brought into sharp focus for the Soviet leadership a number of serious problems concerning the Soviet Union's military posture and its adequacy for support of Khrushchev's political strategy. To mention a few, there are such problems as: how to erase the US margin of strategic superiority; what choice to make between expensive space programs and strengthening of strategic forces; what mix to choose between offensive weapons systems and defensive systems, such as a costly AICBM program; how to develop better capabilities for overseas projection of Soviet military forces; what further allocation of resources to military purposes will the Soviet economy stand, etc.

Some, perhaps most of these problems antedate the Cuban affair itself. In fact, the Cuban MRBM/IRBM deployment [^{was} may have been] in part a quick fix attempt to redress the strategic imbalance. Its failure--with consequent damage to the Soviet Union's world power image and to the credibility of the Soviet strategic deterrent--will certainly bring additional pressures on the Soviet leadership to reassess their position on major questions of state and defense policy. This reassessment could be complicated by differences within the leadership, possibly exacerbated by the Cuban affair.

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The next few months to a year may therefore be an exceedingly critical period--a kind of cross-roads of decision for the Soviet leadership, with significant implications for the future of the East-West struggle. Even a decision to stand pat and make no major changes in their present military posture and programs in response to the Cuban experience would, of course, be significant.

It is important for us to have as full an understanding as possible of the climate in which major Soviet military policy decisions may be taken and of the alternative courses open to them--together with the costs and constraints which would press upon their choices.

This is important not only in order to anticipate as best we can the range of choices open to the Soviets and their implications for our own defense policy, but also in order to influence Soviet decisions, if possible, in directions most favorable to our own interests.

The purpose of this paper is to identify some of the principal factors which will bear upon Soviet decision-making in the area of military policy in the period ahead, and to suggest lines of study that it may be profitable to pursue. Many uncertainties are inherent in the problem at the start. Some of them may be resolved over time as on-going Soviet actions and decisions manifest themselves either openly or through our intelligence coverage. Other uncertainties will undoubtedly persist. One of the incidental purposes of the paper is to suggest indicators of Soviet choices in one direction or another that may prove useful in the process of preparing intelligence estimates on the Soviet military posture.

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II. The Cuban Background -- Why the Missile Deployment?

A useful first step in examining possible changes in the Soviet military posture which may be made in the wake of the Cuban experience would seem to be an analysis of why the Soviets chose to deploy a nuclear threat on the US flank in the first place.

Obvious military advantages would stem from a Cuba-based missile force which could bring a sizeable portion of US strategic striking power under a no-warning attack, or threaten American cities with destruction. Such a force--quickly emplaced and utilizing plentiful medium-range missiles to augment the role of relatively scarce ICBM's in the Soviet inventory--would help restore the balance of strategic forces. It would increase the credibility of Soviet deterrence, improve Soviet pre-emptive capability, which has been a matter of keen concern to the military leadership, and it might even promise to draw some fire away from the Soviet Union itself in the event of war.]

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However, a plausible theory of the Cuban missile deployment can [clearly] not be based on military grounds alone. The attainment of major political leverage for the Soviet Union on such issues as Berlin and overseas bases, satisfaction of Cuban pressures for a deterrent against US invasion, the driving of a divisive wedge between the US and its alliance partners, intra-Bloc politics forcing the Soviet Union to adopt a more vigorous role as protector of revolutionary movements, internal Soviet politics--all of these and other factors may have weighed in some measure on the Soviet decision to deploy an offensive weapons capability to Cuba in the face of US warnings as to the gravely provocative character of such a move.

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A key problem of analysis is to determine the relative weight of the various policy calculations which may have lain behind the Soviet attempt to confront the US with a missile fait accompli in Cuba. To pose two broad alternatives: Was improvement of the military-strategic posture of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the US the compelling imperative behind the Soviet move? Or was the move primarily a bold gamble to obtain major political leverage, with the missile bases regarded as blue chip bargaining counters to strengthen the Soviet negotiatory position on a range of issues--Berlin, overseas bases, non-interference with the Castro regime, etc?

If the former were the case--with the missile deployment undertaken despite the high risks inherent in such a move--this would suggest that the motivation to strengthen the Soviet military posture will not be diminished, but in fact further enhanced by the abortive Cuban experience. Hence, one could look for a continuation of strenuous and perhaps still more ingenious efforts to repair the strategic power balance.

On the other hand, if improvement of the Soviet military posture had been looked upon as only incidental to a primarily political gamble in Cuba from which the Soviets were prepared to withdraw in case of bumps on the head--negotiating as they backed off, then major post-Cuban efforts to enhance their military posture and willingness to devote large additional resources to this purpose would seem somewhat less likely. In fact, there might even be a disposition to look more seriously for political solutions of a kind which might be accompanied by levelling off or reduction of military effort--a Berlin settlement, non-aggression pacts, new European security arrangements, arms control agreements, etc.

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It is of course quite possible that the Cuban missile venture was born of a convenient union between a felt need to improve the Soviet military posture over the long pull and the requirements of a political strategy with more immediate objectives in view. In this case--perhaps the more likely one--it will be very difficult to sort out and assign a relative weight to the various Soviet policy calculations involved. Nevertheless, while an attempt to reconstruct Soviet policy with regard to the Cuban venture may cast little direct light on future Soviet military policy decisions, it should furnish some insights of at least indirect value.

A brief discussion of a number of further considerations relevant to a study of why the Soviets sent missiles to Cuba is attached at Annex 1.

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III. Some Alternative Soviet Military Choices

In the aftermath of the Cuban crisis, there are a variety of courses the Soviets could take in the development of their military posture. One course might be to continue essentially unchanged a deliberate and conservative buildup within the general force structure and budgetary patterns which have hitherto obtained. On the other hand, as indicated in the preceding discussion, failure of the Cuban effort could stimulate vigorous attempts to offset its adverse effects, with attendant possibility of significant changes in present military programs.

These changes might range from reallocation of funds among various military claimants, keeping within existing budgetary constraints, to substantial overall increases in defense spending which would go to strengthening priority programs--such as those aimed at redressing the strategic imbalance between U.S.-Soviet strategic forces. None of the choices are likely to be easy, since the competition for resources between defense and economic requirements has already been a troubled issue within the Soviet bureaucracy.

With regard to assessing Soviet reactions, which at best may be only partly visible in the months ahead, special attention needs to be given to development of indicators which will alert the U.S. to important shifts in Soviet military programs. Some ideas of what to look for are included in the following discussion of the main Soviet alternatives.

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1. Measures to Address the Current Strategic Imbalance

It seems likely that measures to improve the current strategic nuclear force relationship and to restore the somewhat tarnished power image of the Soviet Union would be at the top of the post-Cuban agenda. Various routes would be open for consideration, involving different lead times, varying demand on resources, and alternative emphasis on the major mission areas. The general trend of the Soviet defense effort for the past few years has shown a rise in expenditures for the strategic attack and air defense missions, which according to U.S. intelligence estimates now account for about one-half of total mission expenditures, with ground and naval missions accounting for the other half.* A further readjustment

*The latest tentative intelligence estimate by CIA on Soviet military expenditures shows the following trend in mission-associated expenditures between 1958 and 1962.

	<u>1958</u>		<u>1962</u>	
		Rubles (Bil, 1955 Prices)		Rubles (Bil, 1955 Prices)
	<u>Percent</u>		<u>Percent</u>	
Ground Mission	49	4.4	33	3.9
Naval Mission	19	1.7	15	1.8
Air Defense Mission	16	1.5	26	3.0
Strategic Attack Mission	<u>16</u>	<u>1.4</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>3.0</u>
	100%	9.0	100%	11.8

(Mission-related expenditures are estimated to represent about 65% of total defense expenditures. They exclude such costs as R&D, general support, etc.).

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of this pattern to favor the strategic attack mission, and perhaps the air defense mission--both of which in the Soviet view affect the strategic force equation--might be undertaken. The time factor--which program changes would most rapidly improve the Soviet position?--would probably be an important consideration.

Some specific program changes which might be contemplated are:

a. Step Up the ICBM Program.

This would involve increased production of ICBM's, expansion of the site construction program, acceleration and improvement of hardening measures, readiness, etc. Decisions might involve choice between proven earlier generation missiles and improved models not ready for production and deployment, with attendant programming difficulties. An attempt to speed the incorporation of super-megaton warheads into operational missile systems could be an aspect of the Soviet program.

A major Soviet effort to catch up with the U.S. in the area of strategic weapons, even if decisions were taken now, would probably not show up in substantial increases over the presently estimated Soviet ICBM program in less than about two years. It would almost certainly require a sizeable increase in the military budget, unless other programs were ruthlessly pared.

Indicators to watch for would include changes in the rate of site clearance and construction, possibly slow down of the space program, a budget increase, and evidence of very high-yield warhead applications.

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b. Expansion of Missile-Launching Sub Program.

This is a possible companion measure to an ICBM speed-up which would offer a way to increase strategic strike capabilities by building on an established program. Results in such a program would, however, be felt less soon than in the case of ICBM acceleration. Among indicators which might signal Soviet decisions to go ahead faster in this area would be increased emphasis on submerged-launch subs more comparable to the Polaris type, an increase in test-firing schedules of associated missiles, and deployment of such systems near the U.S. In this connection, Soviet activity with regard to possible deployment of a forward submarine base in Cuba would also be pertinent.

c. Redeployment of MRBM/IRBM Forces.

Although the Soviet effort to enhance their strategic reach and striking power by deployment of these missiles to Cuba failed, it should not be overlooked that they might try the same method again, though probably in some other area. [Shifts in deployment to cover additional areas around the Soviet periphery, including Alaska, might be undertaken.] On the whole, this sort of quick fix seems to be of marginal utility, however, so far as concerns a substantial increase in the direct strategic threat to the U.S.

d. Acceleration of AICBM Program.

Acceleration of the Soviet program to develop and deploy an AICBM system might be a Soviet choice intended to yield important psychological impact, as well as having an effect on U. S. strategic superiority. Even if claims ran ahead of actual accomplishment, the

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Soviets might feel there were important advantages in taking the lead in this aspect of the strategic race. However, difficult decisions of deployment--defend cities or military targets? zonal or point defense? coordinate use with air defenses?--would probably tend to crowd upon the Soviets before they were technically ready to commit themselves to great resource demands in this area.

Indicators to watch for would include increased activity and construction at the Kamchatka Peninsula portion of the ICBM test range, nuclear-associated developments, increased activity at Sary Shagan, and deployment of ABM installations as the probable precursor of AICBM systems.

e. Increased ASW Program.

Efforts to improve Soviet ASW capabilities could represent an additional avenue for improvement of their strategic position, since a major objective of such a program would probably be to reduce the effectiveness of the U.S. Polaris system.

2. "Space Spectacular" Measures.

A second broad area of possible Soviet response to Cuba might be to strive for some new space demonstration which could be exploited for its psychological value as has been the case in the past. A serious attempt to try for a military space advantage might also be weighed, although the uncertain results, the lead times and the diversion of resources from other efforts to build up solid military muscle would probably give the Soviets reason to pause before committing themselves too deeply in this direction.

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Should they seek a military space advantage, their efforts might be directed toward a bombardment satellite system employing super-megaton weapons, a manned space station, anti-satellite systems, etc.

3. Measures to Improve Overseas Capabilities.

One of the lessons of Cuba which could have impressed itself on Soviet planners is the need for development of forces better suited for overseas projection of Soviet military pressure than those which were available to them in the Cuban crisis. This has long been a gap in the Soviet military posture, and it is not likely that any measures immediately within their capability could do much to change the basic inferiority in which they find themselves in this respect vis-a-vis the great maritime powers of the Atlantic Alliance.

However, the Soviets might conclude that the time for a start in this direction is long overdue. Measures which they might set in motion could include development of improved naval capabilities for support of long-range military operations and improved capabilities for long-range air supply of military operations overseas. An increase in Soviet acquisition of commercial bottoms could represent another aspect of this problem to which attention would seem important.

4. Program and Force Cutbacks.

The Soviets could not, of course, begin to undertake major program efforts in all the directions listed above, even if they had far greater resources at their disposal than is the case. In fact, if only part of the add-on programs were contemplated, a necessary

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corollary would almost certainly be to decide on program and force cuts elsewhere. This is an exceedingly difficult process in any bureaucracy, the Soviet one being no exception.

To make great increases in the strategic area, corresponding cuts would apparently have to come from the ground forces, and supporting air and surface navy missions, which have already been effected by military reforms of the past few years. There was much resistance among the military to Khrushchev's January 1960 reforms, based on the idea of fewer men - more nuclear fire power. The military wanted to keep both, and to a considerable extent they did succeed in modifying Khrushchev's program.

A new attempt now to shift military programs and force structure in a radically changed direction would undoubtedly generate great cross-pressures among contending elements within the Soviet defense bureaucracy. -- A not unlikely outcome could be some patching and paring of existing forces -- but no sweeping changes that would cut too deeply into any major set of interests and thus upset a delicate bureaucratic equilibrium. This is among the constraints upon Soviet response to which attention should be given.

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IV. Costs and Constraints.

Should the Soviets decide to undertake major shifts in their current military programs, it will not be easy to do so. Current programs, as noted above, have a momentum of their own. The Soviets will have to find ways of stopping some of them and shifting resources to the new programs they may decide upon. This takes time. Thus, even if decisions are made soon it would be some time before U. S. intelligence could first begin to see signs of the changes. However, the Soviets may announce in one way or another some of the changes in order to maximize the short run effect they may achieve. For example, they may announce a military budget increase, or may claim and demonstrate anti-satellite capabilities.

Whatever the Soviets choose to do concerning their future military programing, these choices will be conditioned by a variety of economic constraints. They can increase their aggregate military effort only by reducing expenditures elsewhere. However, we need to know more about the particular programs in the civilian sector most likely to be affected by an increase in specific military programs. For example, will a major increase in the Soviet ICBM program most likely lead to a big reduction in housing construction? What would be the dislocating effects of further military increases on the machinery and equipment sectors of the Soviet economy, etc.?

The Soviets currently have a manpower constraint, especially in those age groups most suitable for military service. How will this operate to effect their choice of military programs?

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There are also a number of other specific constraints on program changes. Of special importance are lead times involved in decisions to initiate program changes, lead times in getting the new programs started, including the lead times involved in stopping ongoing programs so that resources can be devoted to the newer programs, etc.

The Soviet space program directly competes for resources that could go into an accelerated ICBM program. The space program also competes for resources important to AICBM programs. Soviet decisions on these three programs may be especially interrelated.

In order to get some idea of the economic problems involved for the Soviets we need to have cost estimates made of the alternative choices before them. We also need to have assembled as much information as possible on specific resource constraints and program tradeoffs required, e.g., space vs ICBM. As part of this costing effort, the cost of the Cuban missile and bomber forces as compared with a roughly equivalent ICBM missile force based in the Soviet Union should be estimated. Such an estimate might be of help in deciding why the Soviets went into the Cuban buildup.

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IV. How Can the US Influence Changes in Soviet Military Posture?

Consideration of US moves to influence the direction that the Soviet defense effort may take raises the prior question: In what direction would the US prefer them to go? It also requires recognition of the influence on Soviet decisions is uncertain at best, and will probably be marginal in most circumstances now foreseeable.

With respect to US preferences, no very clear picture is at hand. For example, at one level of preference, is a stable deterrent relationship with force "parity" preferred by the US over a policy that seeks to maintain US strategic superiority as long as possible? At another level of detail, would the US prefer the Soviets to make large defensive outlays in AICBM's or put the equivalent effort somewhere else in offensive systems? If AICBM's are the preferred course from a US viewpoint, then would it be better if they were deployed to defend cities or military targets, and so on?

This is an area that requires careful study and some minimum consensus before much can be done to choose US moves to influence Soviet military posture decisions. However, a few tentative guidelines for US preferences might be put as follows:

1. Prefer a defensive orientation rather than offensive emphasis in Soviet posture.

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2. Prefer slow-reacting to quick-reacting strategic forces.
3. Prefer smaller numbers of well-controlled and protected nuclear delivery forces to larger numbers of less controlled and more poorly protected forces.
4. Prefer the Soviet Union to orient its military forces toward the Eurasian continent rather than having their main thrust shifted to the US and overseas objectives.

This is a minimal list of guidelines, on which there may well be some dispute. It probably ought to be refined and extended.

In keeping generally with these "principles", some possible US moves which might influence Soviet decisions in various areas of military policy are discussed below. It is by no means clear whether some of these moves would be in the US interest at all, at least not before having examined them in great depth. Throughout, the basic assumption is made that the Soviets are going to carry out a defense program at least as large, if not larger, than the present one--and that the aim of US moves is merely to influence the program in preferred directions.

Soviet Strategic Forces

- The best US move to discourage the Soviets from a stepped-up numbers race in ICBM's would be to make clear that the US is willing and better able to afford this kind of game than the USSR. In this connection, it would be important to make the point that the Soviets cannot hope to pull away from us in a missile race by sprinting, since we have the standby capacity to increase our own programs--Minuteman,

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Polaris, etc--faster than the Soviets could hope to catch up.

- Short of specific arms control agreements which might place agreed limits on strategic forces, there are probably opportunities in various negotiating environments to foster Soviet interest in better command and control arrangements, more stable forces, etc.

- US emphasis on improving ASW capabilities would be a move which might affect Soviet decisions on missile-launching subs.

- Other US moves might be to deflect Soviet effort from strategic strike force increases to other areas less critical from a US viewpoint--air defense, space, maintenance of large ground forces, etc. These are touched on below.

Soviet Air Defense

- US moves should encourage the Soviets to continue the heavy emphasis they have given to air defense, and in fact to help persuade them if possible that this is the prime area into which their efforts to balance the strategic equation should go.

- One way of doing this would be to demonstrate to the Soviets that the coming of the missile age does not mean they can lower their defense against aircraft. A clear US interest in the continued employment of manned bombers would help make this point. New problems might be posed for the Soviet air defenses--such as low altitude, supersonic penetrators like SLAM, CLAM, etc. Overseas-based US weapons could be of special value in diversifying the air-breathing threat to Soviet defenses.

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- US moves should perhaps encourage the Soviets to make a maximum effort to defend their cities with early AICBM deployment, not only because of the resource drain from other programs, but because this would least interfere with accomplishment of preferred US retaliatory options against the Soviet Union. At the same time, of course, the US would have to think about its own missile defense and penetration aids programs.

Space

- Diversion of major Soviet resources and effort from strategic strike force improvements in the near time-frame might be brought about by encouraging a still larger Soviet space effort, since space and missiles would be competitive for many of the same resources.

However, in the longer-term, the possible military pay-offs of such Soviet effort might be risky for the US, particularly if the US had not made comparable military space efforts.

- The most direct way to influence the Soviets in the space area would probably be by the challenge of accomplishments--and the size of space budgets. It would not automatically follow, of course, that an increased US challenge would elicit a Soviet boost in space expenditure; it might have the opposite effect, and lead them to give up many space activities for more concentration on directly applicable military programs.

Soviet Ground Forces

- Reduction of Soviet ground forces, still maintained at strength levels which appear considerably in excess of potential requirements

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in Eurasia, would represent a means for the Soviets to free resources for other missions, providing the high internal resistance of the Soviet military leaders to such a move could be overcome.

- It might therefore be in the US interest--short of a situation in which extensive arms reduction agreements obtained--to encourage the maintenance of large Soviet ground forces in order to keep an estimated third of Soviet military mission expenditures tied down in this manner. Strong NATO forces--necessary in any case against the Soviet military threat in this area--would probably provide the necessary stimulus for the Soviets to keep their ground forces levels high.

- US moves with respect to the large medium range missile forces which the Soviets maintain poised against Europe require very thoughtful study. In the wake of Cuba, the Soviets might attempt to exploit these forces for politico-military pressure on Europe more than they have done hitherto--as compensation, perhaps, for their long-range strategic inferiority vis-a-vis the US. Both military and political preparations (perhaps multilateral MRBM force for NATO and frank disclosure of threat dimensions to our European allies), may be necessary to reduce the impact of any major Soviet exploitation of their large MRBM/IRBM forces.

Soviet Secrecy Barriers

- Because Soviet secrecy has been to the USSR a major military asset, with an intimate bearing on Soviet military posture, the question is

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pertinent: how should the US try to influence Soviet decisions in respect to preservation of secrecy?

- US moves should probably be taken to exploit the large role played by air surveillance in the Cuban matter in sparing the world a far worse crisis later on, had the missiles not been detected early, etc. The establishment of a kind of de facto acceptance of surveillance might be followed by attempts to make it a normative mode of international life and to give additional sanction to US efforts to deal with Soviet secrecy.

- In connection with air surveillance generally, a US move to be given serious thought now would be some kind of recon program over Communist China--justified perhaps on the grounds that clandestine development of a nuclear capability in China would be a "public menace" comparable to the importation of nuclear weapons into Cuba, and hence timely knowledge of it essential to keeping the peace. Such a program involving China might be given tacit assent by the Soviets [possibly even a private photo-sharing deal worked out--although the odds are probably high against this eventuality.]

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ANNEX 1 - FACTORS BEARING ON SOVIET MISSILE DEPLOYMENT TO CUBA

The initial Soviet decision to deploy offensive missiles to Cuba apparently was made as early as last spring, and certainly--considering lead times involved--not later than early summer. Various aspects of this decision and its timing are of interest in attempting to reconstruct Soviet policy calculations which may have led to the deployment.

Question of Timetable

For example, with respect to Soviet political objectives, was the missile build-up planned to coincide with a Soviet-initiated crisis elsewhere--such as new demands on Berlin? According to one interpretation of the evidence, the Soviets did have a rather precisely coordinated timetable--with new pressures on Berlin, conspicuously "postponed" until after the US November elections, scheduled to coincide with "unveiling" of the missile threat in Cuba. Soviet public and private denials of any intention to furnish offensive weapons to Cuba might be seen as a further deceptive device to help carry off a well-timed surprise. According to another interpretation, however, the Soviets could not have counted on the missile build-up remaining hidden long enough to permit such precise timing. Consequently, the inference drawn is that the Soviets may have had in mind no single, specific objective like a new squeeze on Berlin, but rather may have been banking on the missile deployment to open up for them a range of opportunities for pressure on the US.

A useful task of analysis would be to test these alternative interpretations, since other implications flow from them. For example, if a precise time-table

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involving Berlin were the case, it would seem more likely that Khrushchev had his eye primarily on the political ball, with the missile deployment representing a "quick fix" to shore up the Soviet strategic posture during an anticipated levying of new political demands on Berlin. A greater disposition to trade-off the Cuban missiles for major political gains would also be implied. On the other hand, if the missile deployment were set in the context of general improvement of the Soviet deterrent and negotiatory posture, with no specific time-table to be met, it would seem more likely that the Soviets counted upon leaving the missiles in place and that a lasting alteration in the strategic balance had been high in their calculations.

Neither hypothesis, of course, rules out the possibility that the Soviets may have hoped for a US response which would allow them to reap specific political gains while at the same time preserving a significant addition to their strategic posture. This leads to another important task of analysis-- to examine the likely Soviet estimate of US response to the Cuban missile deployment.

Soviet Pre-Crisis Estimate of US Response

It seems obvious on the face of it that the Soviets badly miscalculated American response to the missile buildup. Some expectation that the US might resort to naval blockade seems indicated by Khrushchev's private remarks-- prior to the flare-up of the crisis--on the matter of interference with shipping on the high seas. On the whole, however, the Soviets seem to have calculated that the US would take up a negotiating stance, rather than precipitating a confrontation of force over the missile question.

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On the matter of US willingness to risk general war, or to launch an immediate attack on Cuba in response to the missile deployment, it would seem plausible to suppose that neither of these possible reactions had weighed significantly in the initial Soviet calculations. Otherwise, in light of subsequent developments, it seems unlikely the Soviets would have attempted a nuclear/missile buildup in the first place. It is not clear how appreciably the Soviet view of the general war danger changed as the crisis developed, although their concern about invasion certainly seems to have risen sharply.

Anent the general war question, Khrushchev has apparently operated for some time on the assumption--or conviction--that the US would not risk nuclear war except under the most extreme provocation. US actions over time in moving from a strategy of "massive retaliation" to one of "flexible and controlled response", Khrushchev's encounters with the President, apparent reluctance of the US government to become militarily involved in Cuba again after the Bay of Pigs adventure--these and other factors may have strengthened Khrushchev's conviction that a speedily engineered missile deployment in Cuba would not be taken by the US as a provocation extreme enough to merit the risk of nuclear war. In Khrushchev's own book, of course, it is evident that Cuba was not worth the risk of nuclear war to the Soviet Union.

Reaction to US Response

When the US responded as it did to the discovery of the missile sites, Khrushchev--at some point in the tense latter days of October--may have suffered

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a sudden collapse of confidence in his estimate of US willingness to face nuclear war over Cuba. This might help explain the ragged performance of the Soviet leadership over the long weekend of 26-28 October, particularly Khrushchev's curious but still publicly undisclosed "emotional" letter at the height of the crisis, and the backdown decision which followed.

What congruent set of US actions and statements might have led to a collapse of confidence by Khrushchev? This calls for careful study of all the "signals"--deliberate or otherwise--which we may have been giving off at the time, but a few may be mentioned here: the military movements and intense activity in the SE United States, which may have looked very much like an invasion precursor; SAC's readiness posture, which included a larger-scale and more rapid dispersal of the force than had ever occurred before; the "abyss of destruction" tone of some high-level US statements during the crisis; US private communications to its Allies which conveyed a sense of US seriousness that the Soviets would rate all the higher had they acquired knowledge of the contents by intelligence means, which was probably the case. Further, the accidental but uncannily well-timed intrusion of a U-2 into Soviet arctic airspace may have struck the Soviets as a classic indicator of preparation for a US strategic attack, touching on a chord of Soviet concern that "preventive war"--so often harped upon in Soviet propaganda and military literature--might now be on the way.

These same factors, differently perceived and evaluated in Moscow, might also of course have been taken to foreshadow an invasion of Cuba, rather than an attack on the Soviet Union. Indeed, apart from the hints of a great disarray

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among the Soviet leadership which one might tend to associate with anxiety over the risk of nuclear war, most elements of the situation might suggest that invasion--and the consequences of coping with it--lay at the center of Soviet concern.

It must have been fairly apparent to Moscow, for example, that the US did not have to resort to nuclear weapons either to enforce the quarantine, to knock out the missile sites, or to invade Cuba--and that therefore the main danger of escalation into nuclear war would come from Soviet response to a US non-nuclear initiative. It was therefore the prospect of a clash of conventional forces--in which geography and other factors would have spelled certain loss for the Soviet-Cuban side--which in the first instance may have dismayed the Soviet leadership. Their concern would have been compounded, of course, by knowing that once invasion were underway, they would have to face the hard and perhaps impossible choice of either knuckling under and accepting the loss of both their missiles and probably the Castro regime, or incurring irresponsible nuclear risks of their own making. The psychological strain of being put in this position could well account for the anomalies in Soviet leadership behavior which have been noted, although it should also be added that the pattern of behavior which eventually governed was highly rational--Khrushchev offered in haste to withdraw his offending missiles without waiting to find out whether the US really meant to adopt a violent solution.

Soviet Crisis Lessons

Indeed, Khrushchev showed a very high capacity for "crisis learning". Although he had perhaps held the US nuclear writ in contempt when establishing a military foothold in Cuba in the first instance, and had taken an even bolder

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step later by introducing a nuclear/missile capability, he quickly applied self-imposed restrictions on Soviet conduct when strong US reaction was encountered.

In this connection, the military lessons which Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders may have drawn from the Cuban experience are worth careful study. Did they at one extreme, for example, suffer the traumatic experience of peering into the abyss of nuclear war, and from this may they have drawn the conclusion--already an article of Soviet doctrine and propaganda--that limited conflicts between nuclear powers are uncontrollable and must inevitably escalate into general nuclear war? Or may they have drawn precisely the opposite conclusion--that limited conflicts, such as Cuba was, even though shooting had not started--are manageable and controllable?

Were the first lesson drawn, conceivably the Soviets might eschew any sort of military confrontation in the future, and seek instead "radical" political solutions. If the second conclusion applies, the Soviets might well feel that limited conflicts can be entertained, providing the conditions are more favorable to the Soviet side than in Cuba. In this light, Cuba's main military lesson for the Soviets might have been: avoid getting into conflict situations where both local and strategic superiority rests preponderantly on the other side. The Cuban experience, of course, would not have illuminated the kind of situation in which one side holds local and the other strategic superiority.

Bold New Strategy or Improvisation

Another task of analysis might be addressed to the question whether the Soviet decision to deploy offensive weapons to Cuba was part of a larger

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decision to project Soviet military force into the Caribbean area under a thoughtfully-planned "forward strategy", or whether it was merely tacked on to the military program for Cuba at some later point--perhaps after US reaction to introduction of modern "defensive" weapons had been tested and deemed not unduly alarming.

The lead time for preparation and shipment of the strategic missile force, its size, the timing of the move--these factors would tend to suggest that the deployment decision was made within the framework of broad strategic planning, rather than on the spur of the moment. On the other hand, the hasty character of the actual operational deployment to field sites, after concealed advance preparation (of duration unknown to us), might suggest that there was a large measure of improvisation involved.

Careful analysis of the whole operation might pin down this question more precisely, and furnish complementary insights into other questions which the Cuban venture raises. For example, there has been little suggestion in Soviet military writing or elite statements of a theoretical foundation for a Soviet "forward strategy", which would represent a new form of challenge to the global strategic dominance of the United States. (Indeed, so far as elite statements go, a contrary concept has been asserted--in the TASS 11 September statement and subsequent elaborations on the point that the Soviet Union has no need to deploy missiles to Cuba or anywhere else outside its own territory, because homeland-based ICBM's can reach the necessary targets anywhere.) If, despite the doctrinal lacuna, the Soviet Cuban venture was carefully conceived to upset the relation of nuclear forces and to stake out a Soviet politico-military power position on the Caribbean flank of the United States, the implications

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would be far-reaching indeed. One might then view Cuba as a major historical turning point, where Soviet policy was to make the switch from plodding, cautious expansionist activity to a forward, out-flanking stroke against the strategic power center of the Atlantic Alliance itself. Cool and daring calculation would be the hallmark of such a strategic conception, and one might well question whether the standard assumptions as to the careful orthodoxy of Soviet strategic thinking are any longer valid.

On the other hand, if the missile venture had in fact been rather hectically improvised and hastily implemented, quite different inferences might be drawn. It might look then more like an act of desperation, a gamble for high stakes in the face of repeated frustration--perhaps the politico-military equivalent of Khrushchev's Virgin Lands solution to his persistent agricultural problem. Rather than a new forward turning point in Soviet policy, one might interpret the Soviet Cuban move as a belated effort to salvage a deteriorating international position.

Soviet Leadership Factions

Another area of analysis in which the available evidence probably does not go very far is that of attempting to distinguish various factions and positions within the Soviet leadership which may have had significant bearing on the way the Cuban venture was conceived and handled, and on how its aftermath may be dealt with.

The relationship between Khrushchev and the Soviet military leadership is pertinent in this connection, as well as that between putative--but unproven--"hard" and "soft" factions in the Soviet bureaucracy. Several hypothesis can be advanced.

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As to Khrushchev and the Soviet military, it can be argued that the missile deployment was Khrushchev's brain child, conceived as a political gamble upon which the military looked without enthusiasm. When the game went sour, it was the Soviet military leaders, under this hypothesis, who brought pressure on Khrushchev to withdraw because they smelled the risk of general war which the Soviet Union was not in shape to fight, and because they feared the loss of modern Soviet weapons and highly trained personnel, etc. If this interpretation is sound, one could presume that the military elite, who have frequently found fault with Khrushchev's defense policies over the last three years, would now press with new vigor for allocation of greater resources to the military establishment. They might also tend to ally themselves with any opposition elements among the political leadership who might now be prone to criticize Khrushchev's "adventurism".

A variant of the above hypothesis, which may have some support in the apparent three-sided character of the internal Soviet dialogue on military strategy of the past few years, would link Khrushchev with a kind of "young Turk" faction of "progressives" among the military, ranged against a conservative military majority. In this case, Khrushchev's instincts as a political gambler may have been combined with strategic inspiration from a "progressive" military faction, leading to the belief that a bold solution of the strategic imbalance was possible.

On the other hand, it can also be argued that quite different positions were taken by Khrushchev and the military respectively. The latter may have been the staunchest advocates of the initial deployment of missiles, on the

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theory that only thus could the Soviet Union hope to gain significant ground in the numbers race in strategic forces, and improve its pre-emptive capability, about which they had been professionally concerned since Malinovsky's "theses" in October 1961 drew attention to the critical nature of the initial period of a war which the "imperialists" might initiate with an attempted nuclear surprise attack. Under this hypothesis, it may have been Khrushchev who went along with the missile scheme with reservations, and who at the first sign of mis-carriage sought to back out without even attaching conditions to his retreat. The subsequent demand for a Turkey-Cuba missile swap may, in this view, have emanated from pressures on Khrushchev by a hard faction, which subsequently found itself sidetracked when the crisis seemed about to split wide open.

Further speculation on internal alignments does not seem warranted here, although patient combing of the evidence might yield some useful insight into this aspect of the Cuban affair, and consequently, help to indicate what weight the voice of the military may carry in the post-Cuban reassessment of the Soviet military posture.

The range of possible interpretations illustratively suggested above indicates that some of the factors bearing on the Soviet missile deployment to Cuba are by no means self-evident, and that there is need for an analytical effort that would tie the various strands of Soviet motivation and behavior in the crisis more closely together.

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